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AUTHOR Reilly, David H.
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ABSTRACT

Two factors are responsible for the abuses in testing of children: emotional expectations and a misdirected educational training system. The former is most prevalent among those who are not thoroughly trained in testing and test interpretation, and should be responded to by maintaining strict certification standards. The second reason for abuses in testing, a misdirected educational training system, could be partially resolved by strengthening the competencies of educators in such areas as how to achieve a sense of self competence and identity, how to get along with others, how to work within and with a group without losing a sense of self, how to rear children, how to use leisure time, and how to decide on a vocation. Teachers should be trained for involvement in an educational enterprise that deals with values and people, not just academic matters. (Author)

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Beyond the Test Score

School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

David H. Reilly

As I understand the objectives of this workshop there are three:

1) To sensitize standardized test users in interpreting test results in order to reduce test abuses.
2) To determine how to evaluate more reliable data for better assessment of the needs of minority group youngsters.
3) To cause participants to develop a more positive feeling for the pluralistic cultural influences as they relate to the total society.

I think these objectives are honorable and needed although I have some minor disagreement with the first one, but I'll remark on that a bit later.

I would like to respond to these objectives from two perspectives the first that of a school psychologist with about twelve years of experience, and the second as the dean of a School of Education, about four months experience. The former hat, I must admit, has been worn and battered long enough so that it fits more comfortably. The second being newer, still has a tendency to slip at times, particularly when situations arise where education cannot or does not respond as adequately or as quickly as I think it should.

As a school psychologist, I have observed many abuses of the causes for the objectives set forth here and the greatest tragedy was that these abuses were committed by well meaning people who

CG 010 005

had no intention of doing harm to children but who for the most part were sincerely trying to do what they believed best.

This, I believe, happened as a result of two factors, both intertwined and interdependent. The perception of these factors developed as a result of being a psychologist, kind of a diagnostic role, but as a psychologist I was at a loss as to what could be done about them. It has only been since becoming more identified as an educator and responsible for many facets of educational training that some slight ideas about possible directions to move have emerged.

The two factors which I feel are responsible for the abuses in assessment of children, particularly minority group children, are emotional expectations and a misdirected educational training system, the responsibility for which must be shared by many groups.

Ever since the days of Binet, and even before, it was observed that some children did not learn as fast as others. Binet gave us a quantifiable method of measuring, probably not the best, but at least a method, which would allow us to group children according to learning aptitude. This method rapidly became exceedingly popular, particularly in this country. That it was hastened by events external to education for the most part, such as WWI, is irrelevant for our purpose today. The fact that it fit neatly into a time span which included Dewey, the mental health movement, child guidance center movement, and others, is not irrelevant. For these movements supported several notions that had a lot to do with children. These included (1) some children learn faster than others, (2) those children who learn more slowly

or differently need a different type of education, a special kind of education and (3) the most dangerous notion of all, that the cause for these children learning more slowly or differently was internal to the child. This attidude was perhaps most closely related to the mental health movement which held in its early days that pathology was attributable to some internal disorder. We have the physical disease "germ" theory to thank for that.

What these notions did however was to provide the groundwork for the emotional expectation that some children were doomed to fail and that the general reason for it was internal to the child, whatever the specific cause might be. Thus there was ready acceptance for the feeling that when a child achieved a low IQ it was unfortunate, but that's the way things happened.

It never occurred to us, at least until recently, and unfortunatly under duress even then, to examine the other side of the coin, that is, to ask the question, is it an environmental difference causing Johnny to learn differently or to learn things not tapped by the test?

A related question which has not been asked too often, and I must admit that on those occasions I have asked it, I have received only blank stares is: "Do you think a different learning situation is causing a lowered IQ score rather than a low IQ causing poor learning?" This question seemed to take people unawares, they were not expecting it, and didn't want to consider it because it ran counter to one of their very cherished ideas, which was that the IQ didn't change, except maybe by a couple of points and that one ended up pretty much with the IQ he was born with. You would be surprised at the number of educators who not only accept but

believe that the IQ is fixed, and from a very early time in life, and that it represents the totality of one's intelligence.

This notion of the fixed IQ lent credence to the idea of special education. Since the children couldn't learn as fast because of their lower IQ and since we didn't believe the IQ could change, the earlier we got them into special education the better it was for them. To be sure we talked about reevaluations and moving children out of special education, but really how many children once in special education have ever been reevaluated, much less moved out?

Another point with regard to our emotional set about testing and special education which will lead us directly to a concern about why so many non-white children are in special education as compared to white children.

This point is one I referred to earlier, implied in the first objective of this workshop and with which I have some disagreement. I am referring to the fact that we talk about tests as the culprit which has caused so many abuses. But really it is not the tests. IQ tests were designed to do one particular task, identify what the expected learning rate of the child would be, in a particular kind of school, housing a particular kind of student, and with such student defined by the norm group of the test.

It is the use to which the test results have been put that has caused the abuses. These uses include the unquestioned acceptance of test scores by well meaning but uninformed and in some cases, ill-trained personnel who have taken test scores to represent the totality of a child's functioning, rather than considering the scores as one estimate of one part of a child's life, and further that this

estimate could be the result of many factors.

Again, for emphasis, it is not the tests which are at fault, but rather the people who have taken the test scores at face validity and not questioned the appropriateness of the content validity.

What the tests were not asked to do, nor were they designed to do, is identify the social inequities that permit a child to receive a low score. To a WISC or Binet, all children who receive a score of 60 or any other score are alike. Yet we know there are vast differences between the child who receives a score of 60 because he has a brain lesion and the child who receives an IQ of 60 because he comes from a home where there is little money, no books, no reward for going to school, much less doing well, overcrowded conditions, where there is no expected good job for finishing school at the top of the class and a host of other factors which take away from a child's expectancy of doing well. To a Binet and WISC these children who score the same are alike. But what is important is why these children received these scores, and this the tests cannot tell. Only well-trained personnel can by using a wide variety of test procedures.

And here let me air a few of my prejudices, because I think they are valid. Although I have no data, my travels around the state have convinced me that there is an incredible number of well meaning but undertrained professional educational personnel who are making critical decisions about children based on test scores. And in too many instances these personnel have had only one test course, many times short courses for the SIT and some others. Principals, special education teachers, guidance counselors, social workers are

often guilty. These professionals have a vital and necessary role to play in school, but not as assessment specialists. One, or even two courses in test administration should not be viewed as sufficient, or nearly so for testing and making placement decisions about children. It is simply not enough.

Testing, or in its broader sense, assessment, is only one third or less of what is needed for making a placement decision about a child. Equally and probably even more important is an educational plan designed to reduce the dissonance between the child's current level of functioning and where we think he or she can go. The other one third of the assessment is continuous evaluation and modification of the plan. But how many psychological reports have you seen that include an educational plan and evaluation format? How many times have you seen an emphasis on providing the kind of education, curriculum, or experiences designed to provide for an increase in the IQ score? If you talk to many educators, including psychologists about doing something that will raise a child's IQ, they think you don't know much about the IQ's or education. Because remember, the IQ is fixed.

And now a word about school psychologists and the potential for North Carolina's error. This year, for the first time, funds were made available from the state for hiring school psychologists, 60 from the Division for Exceptional Children, and others from the Division for Pupil Personnel Services. Next year there is the possibility for even more.

But who are being certified as school psychologists? There are not enough trained school psychologists to fill the positions, and the widest variety of credentials from non-school psychology

personnel are being offered for certification and, in many instances, these people have only one course in testing to submit. These people, if hired, are going to do a great disservice to children because they have to rely on test scores and do not have the training to allow them to look beyond the test score. I urge each of you to encourage whomever you can to hold the line on the credentials necessary for certification as a school psychologist. Perhaps we won't have as many school psychologists as we would like, but those we get would be able to offer a greater and more valuable service to children.

This leads us now to the question of why there are, percentage wise, so many non-white children in special education as compared to white children. I believe I have outlined many of the reasons but I should like to describe the chain of events which I believe has contributed significantly to this situation.

First, there was a belief that some children couldn't learn.

Second, there was a belief in the fixed IQ.

Third, because of these beliefs, there was a reluctance to question what factors contributed to IQ scores.

Fourth, there was a reluctance to accept the fact that different social patterns or conditions other than the norm group could lead to lower IQ scores.

Fifth, there was the unfortunate situation that many non-white children came from social patterns different from test norm groups.

Sixth, in many cases, under- and even ill-trained test administrators did not look beyond the test score.

All of these conditions led to the emotional set that many non-white children could not learn as rapidly as white children.

But perhaps an even greater fault is to be found within the educational system, the system that allowed many of these conditions

and beliefs to emerge and which did not until recently begin to seriously question their validity.

It is to this system and what can be done with it to rectify matters that I would like to turn our attention. This perhaps is the greatest issue. What can the system do to improve the situation? The answer to this depends on the answer to the question, what do we want the system to do?

Do we want it to just teach children the 3 R's - or is there something else we want the system to do? I believe it is the latter, including such things as contributing to a sense of self competence and identity, how to get along with others, how to work within and with a group, without losing a sense of self, how to rear children, how to use leisure time, how to decide on a vocation, and many others.

If this is what we want the system to do for all children regardless of color, then we're going to have to change the training institutions, and we're going to have to change them most with regard to what we're doing for members of minority groups and we're going to have to face up to the most serious question of all. To what extent and under what conditions, and using what procedures will concerns, social patterns, behaviors, of non-majority groups be introduced into the total society in a way that no one, minority or majority group, suffers; and how do we assure that their heritage is not lost?

The question is not whether they should be. But how does an educational system which has not faced up to these questions, these complex, complicated, interdependent, critical and important questions begin to deal with them and translate them into a viable educational training program?

Sure, we can say, pluralistic assessment is the thing to do, we might even develop tests that have a benign effect, that is, do not penalize the child for his social situation or heritage, but is this enough, or the end result we desire? I don't think so, I think there is much more.

If all we desired from a school was the teaching of the 3 R's we could package Sesame Street K-12 and show it on TV. It would be cheaper and maybe even more effective.

What we are after, I believe, is the concept behind the third objective for this workshop: to develop a more positive feeling for the pluralistic cultural influences of individuals and groups within our society, i.e. respect for one another.

But how, in a teacher training institution, do we teach prospective teachers to teach their students respect for one another? I don't have any pat answers or magic formulas, but I do have some ideas. They aren't new or spectacular but they may have a chance.

First, we must change the concept of what the school's goals and roles are. In an accountability model for North Carolina, December, 1972, an assessment of personnel regarding accountability was held. Some of the questions concerned "Accountable for What?"

Fewer than 50% (41) of the principals agreed that "the public should be held accountable for moral and value development. A large number of respondents were uncertain regarding the school's role.

This kind of data suggests that there is a receptivity for the schools, and by implication teacher training institutions, becoming involved in an educational enterprise that deals with values and people, all people.

We do this by showing students that it is important, that it deserves as much attention as learning how to teach reading. We

show it by example, by being models in the local schools, by teaching in real situations so prospective teachers learn with real students in real situations.

We do it by sensitizing prospective teachers in preservice and current teachers through inservice that children of all colors have common as well as unique needs, and that we must respond to all of these needs.

In essence, I am saying that the system needs additions. It must move to accomodate a wider variety of needs of children by taking a more positive posture with respect to what its role should and can be in society.

When we have achieved this, the objectives for this workshop will have been reached for the objectives reflect symptoms of a greater disturbance and only by dealing with the primary disturbance will successful and positive change have been achieved. This does not mean that we should not deal with the specific issues inherent in the objectives, but we must not allow ourselves to be satisfied with success at that level.

To achieve our objectives we must change the emotional set people have towards testing, we must sensitize people to how testing can be used in a positive manner, but fundamentally, we must modify the system so that it deals more effectively with teaching children and adults how to accept and respect others, regardless of color, background, sex, age, or other such factors.